

Congressional coins to make novel debut

By Roger Boye

Uncle Sam's sixth commemorative coin program of the decade will make its debut on Wednesday—Flag Day—as government dignitaries produce some bicentennial of Congress coins at the U. S. Capitol. The ceremony probably will mark the first time in U. S. history that coins are struck outside of an official mint facility.

Federal legislation requires the mint to sell to collectors three types of Congress bicentennial coins—a copper-nickel half dollar, silver dollar and \$5 gold piece—with production ending by June 30, 1990. Part of the profits from sales will help pay for repairs to the Capitol.

Until July 17, the coins are being offered at special pre-issue discounts with prices ranging from \$7 for a proof half dollar and \$25 for a proof silver dollar to \$220 for a three-coin proof set. To order, send a check to the United States Mint, 10001 Aerospace Drive, Lanham, Md. 20706.



Government technicians have authenticated an unusual error coin, a 1989 quarter that's missing its mint mark.

All 1989 quarters made for circulation are supposed to carry a "P" (for Philadelphia) or "D" (for Denver) near the front side rim at 4 o'clock. The letter failed to form on at least one quarter because of a malfunctioning coin press or because grease or other debris filled part of the die.

A Massachusetts man found the special coin and mailed it to hobby newspaper Numismatic News, which sent it to the government for analysis. In late May several other East Coast collec-

tors contacted the newspaper to report similar finds.

"I've been fielding a call every 15 minutes—from collectors and the news media—and our mail is running four or five times normal," said Alan Herbert, the newspaper's error-coin expert. "The irony is that right now, these things probably are worth two bucks or less."

The price could go up—perhaps way up—as collectors try to buy no-mint-mark quarters from the lucky finders.